The School Improvement Planning Process
Guidance for Schools
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Our statewide goal is to move all students to proficiency by 2014. Each school is working toward that overall goal, as well as to ensure equitable results for all student groups in keeping with NCLB and SB 168. School improvement planning is the central process for reaching those high goals.

This short guide is intended to assist school councils and others involved in school improvement in understanding the critical steps necessary in effective and continuous school improvement.

General Principles

1) **Follow district policy on planning**. While you control the content, always be aware of the specifics of your district's planning policy, including specifics about format, timelines and cycles. The legal basics for planning should be built into your district planning policy and procedures. For a brief overview of those statutes and regulations, you can also review "Planning and Legal Requirements" from the Kentucky Association of School Councils, at www.kasc.net/kasc/planlaw.htm.

2) **Vision, Mission, and Beliefs**. Every step of the school improvement planning process should always be addressed in light of the vision, mission, and beliefs of your school. The question should always be "Does this initiative or strategy line up with our vision, mission, and beliefs?" If your school's vision, mission, and belief statements are not current or need revision, seek assistance from your district in updating them.

3) **The process is continuous**. Beyond those requirements set forth in your district policy, don't hold yourself to specific timelines or cycles. Update as needed. Many times, schools get stuck in a "one year" or "two year" planning cycle. Set your goals, meet them and move on to the next priority need.

4) **Keep good written records for each step**. There is no right way to develop and write a plan, only right steps in the process.

5) **Involve all stakeholder groups in the process**. Every plan gets its strength from the people who are committed to it. To make sure your plan will yield results, engage many parts of your community in understanding the plan, helping you make it stronger, and ultimately becoming invested in making it work.   Include parents, teachers, and other members of school staff in your planning process, and make the draft plan available for input from the entire community.

6) **Work with district and school leaders at each step**. District priority needs and causes may be related to the issues schools are seeing, and their thoughts may help you understand the situation better. In your goals and objectives, their ideas may also change your thoughts. Make sure the plan reflects the combined thinking and planning of a collaborative team.

7) **Use the planning sections of "School Council Proficiency" for best practice.** KDE has endorsed this set of proficiency keys for school councils that include a section on planning. This is not required, but can be beneficial in moving your planning to a proficient level. The keys can be found at www.kasc.net/kasc/proficiency.htm

The Critical Steps of School Improvement Planning

Step 1 – Needs Assessment

What does the data tell us our needs are?
A comprehensive needs assessment looks at data on student performance **and** on the school practices that generate that performance.

For student performance, the core data source is the Kentucky Performance Report (KPR), but a school should also consider additional sources of data, such as ACT scores, formative and summative classroom assessments, and other standardized assessments. High achieving schools engage in continuous forms of assessment and do not rely solely on the annual assessment data that the KPR provides. This data will allow you to see the performance of all population groups in your school and pinpoint the areas of need. Identified gaps in student performance can be addressed through targets for reducing those gaps as required by KRS 158.649 (SB 168) and No Child Left Behind. This data is critical in determining priorities for your school.

School practices are the other part of a complete needs assessment. This data tells what your teachers, administrators, and others in your school community are doing (or not doing) to improve student achievement. In order to be current and comprehensive the needs assessment should look at curriculum, assessment, instruction, school culture, family and community support, professional growth, leadership, resource allocation and the planning process. The most practical way, although not the only model, to accomplish this part of the needs assessment is to use the *Standards and Indicators for School Improvement* (SISI). This tool will allow the school to reflect on all of these nine areas and set performance levels in each area. The school practices data will be beneficial as you look at the factors that caused your needs to exist (See Step 3).

Step 2 – Prioritizing Needs

Which of these identified needs are of greatest concern (2-3 needs)?
Your student performance data analysis may produce a lengthy list of student needs. In the next step of the improvement planning process your school should prioritize these needs and identify just a few as the greatest concerns. It is very important that the school community be focused on two to three major priority needs. More than that will cause staff, students and families to be overwhelmed and struggle to implement all strategies effectively.

Step 3 – Cause Analysis

What factors caused these needs of greatest concern to occur?
Without an understanding of the factors that contributed to each of your priority needs, it is difficult to set goals to address those needs. At this point in the process, return to your school practices data analysis (i.e. the SISI analysis) and reflect on why your needs exist.   For example, one school might find weaknesses in curriculum, while another recognizes difficulties with classroom assessment. Decide which school practices are most important in explaining your student performance, and of those, which ones most need to be addressed.

Step 4 – Setting Goals

What is our goal in addressing each of these needs and when will we reach these goals?

Setting realistic and measurable goals is central to an effective planning process. Goals should be realistic in response to the factors that contributed to the need. Set a goal that is never too high or too low based on these factors. Goals should be measurable in that they should reflect a change in statistical data for some or all of your students. Finally, goals should be time sensitive, with a date by which the goal is to be achieved.

Step 5 – Goal Achieving Activities

What steps will we take to reach our goals and who will oversee each step?

This is the step in the process where your school determines what things have to happen to reach your goal. It is also important to choose someone to be responsible for seeing that each step happens. The key thing to remember here is that each step to achieving your goal should either have a direct impact on students or be an important step preparing to have that impact, such as ongoing professional development and instructional preparations.

Step 6 – Resources

What resources will we need to reach our goal?

When you have determined your goals and your activities to achieve each goal, work out how you will provide needed funding and staff time. It is important to look at all available fiscal resources and determine what program funds can be used to reach your goals. Make particular use of the flexibility offered in state categorical programs as well as any federal dollars. Also remember to take advantage of outside funding sources that could be used for general operating expenditures so that money can be freed to use for improvement goals. Finally, it is appropriate and wise to apply to your local board of education for additional district resources, usually spoken of as "Section 7" dollars, to strengthen your plan.

Step 7 - Monitoring

What methods will we use to ensure each step is completed?

Each school should have a process for checking the implementation of each step towards the goal. This can be accomplished in many ways, from teachers' submitting implementation check sheets to school administrators doing walk through observations to see if the steps are occurring. This process might be included in a school council's policy on planning, and it should be consistent with the local board of education's policy of planning.

Step 8 – Evaluation

> **How will we measure the effectiveness of our actions?**
> The obvious answer here is increased student performance as evidenced by increased test scores. Remember, while action steps to reach a goal are about what teachers will do, the effectiveness of those actions is in changes to the students' performance. Effectiveness can also be measured by a review of student performance data to see if any of the school's perceived weaknesses have been turned into strengths.

The process starts again when you meet a goal or notice new issues in your data on student performance or school practices. Go back to Critical Step *Critical Step 1* and review your needs. What is the next priority? Then jump right back in at Critical Step *Critical Step 2* and follow through to *Critical Step 8.*

Additional Resources

Kentucky Association of School Administrators
http://www.kasa.org/

Kentucky Association for School Councils – Proficiency Keys
http://www.kasc.net/kasc/Proficiency.htm

Kentucky Association for School Councils – Legal Basics for Planning
www.kasc.net/kasc/planlaw.htm

KDE SBDM Page
http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Administrative+Resources/School+Based+Decision+Making/Technical+Assistance/SBDM+Technical+Assistance+Download+Documents.htm

KDE Planning Tools
http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/Administrative+Resources/School+Improvement/Comprehensive+Improvement+Planning/KDE+Planning+Tools+for+Schools+and+Districts.htm

Kentucky Association of School Boards
http://www.ksba.org/Policywhatare.htm